



**Building Inclusive Communities:
Cross-Canada Perspectives and Strategies**

**Prepared for the
Federation of Canadian Municipalities
and
The Laidlaw Foundation**

**by
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The Laidlaw Foundation is a private charitable organization that has adopted social inclusion as the focus of its Children's Agenda funding program. Building inclusive communities and cities is the first arena for applying social inclusion policies and practices. The Foundation is currently funding work by The Federation of Canadian Municipalities on promoting urban social inclusion.¹

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¹ Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2002) *A Partnership Approach for Competitive Cities and Healthy Communities*. Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance, November 7, p. 14.

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A. A NEW NATIONAL CONTEXT

1. Diversity of Canadian Urban Communities

The forces of globalization are changing the relationships between local communities and their national institutions, including governments. Increasingly, the interdependence of economic prosperity with social health and well-being is being recognized.² There is growing understanding of the value of human resources in relation to physical and financial resources, especially in the technological environment of knowledge-based economies.³ All of these national “assets” for growth and development come together in localities. Notably, the Federal Government’s Innovations Strategy refers to the importance of “stewardship regimes” for innovation in the public interest. It identifies urban centers as the locus of such regimes and indicates that communities of physical, human and social capital act as “magnets for investment and growth”.⁴

Urban areas are centres of economic and high value-added production, essential to Canada’s ability to succeed in global trade. At the same time, as a smaller country in the global scene in terms of population, Canada reflects a wide diversity of “urban experience”. More than half the Canadian population now lives in four large urban regions centred in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and Calgary-Edmonton. Several mid-size urban areas such as Winnipeg, Halifax and the Ottawa-Gatineau will each grow significantly over the next two decades. Still, about thirty of Canada’s urban regions are of a moderate population size of 100,000+.⁵ Importantly, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has noted that the growth of urban Canada “provides a robust market for the agricultural and food products, materials and energy” produced in rural Canada, so that the “vitality” of urban and rural Canada is closely tied together.⁶ With such a wide-ranging scale of size among its urban localities, Canada may be well positioned to model national-local strategies that balance economic and social development for the benefit of the entire population.

² John F. Helliwell (2000) Globalization: Myths, Facts, and Consequences. C.D. Howe Institute Benefactor’s Lecture, Toronto, October 23.

A TD Bank Economics Special Report on cities asserts that “economic competitiveness and quality of life are inextricably intertwined.” (*A Choice between Investing in Canada’s Cities or Disinvesting in Canada’s Future* [April 22, 2002], p. 10).

³ Thomas J. Courchene (2001). *A State of Minds. Toward a Human Capital Future for Canadians*. Montreal: Institute for Research in Public Policy.

An Ontario Government report on innovation clusters states categorically that “economic relationships are intertwined with social relationships”, and that high levels of social trust in a community “lubricates the gears of the economic engine.” (The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity [2002]. *A View of Ontario: Ontario’s Cluster of Innovation*, Working Paper No. 1, Toronto, p. 22).

⁴ Government of Canada (2002). *Achieving Excellence. Investing in People, Knowledge and Opportunity*. Section 8 – “Sources of Competitive Advantage are Localized” at www.innovationstrategy.gc.ca The report goes on to say that “it is in communities that the elements of the national innovation system can come together” (p. 72), and that this includes “better stewardship, improved governance and a stronger social fabric.” (p. 78)

⁵ Judy Sgro (2002). *Canada’s Urban Strategy. A Vision for the 21st Century*. Ottawa: Prime Minister’s Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues, Interim Report, April, p. 1.

⁶ Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2002). *A Partnership for Competitive Cities and Healthy Communities*. Ottawa: Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance, November 7, p. 3.

2. Pressures on Municipalities and Communities

Regardless of their relative size, all Canadian urban communities are facing significant social changes entering the 21st century.

- Each year Canada receives over 220,000 newcomers from every part of the world, of which 75% first settle in the large urban regions.
- In recent decades, there has been a significant movement of Aboriginal peoples from First Nations territories into cities, both large and small.
- Disinvestments by senior governments in social housing have created conditions of homelessness too evident on the streets of Canadian towns and cities.
- High levels of child and family poverty are contributing to urban neighbourhoods of disadvantage and despair.
- Disengaged and alienated youth, with limited pathways to opportunity, turn to crime and drugs that, in turn, heightens everyone's sense of insecurity in urban communities.
- There is evidence in large cities that social disparities are becoming more racially concentrated leading to potentially dangerous divisions in urban life.

A decade of federal disengagement from national social programs and provincial restructuring of social policy responsibilities have had major impacts on municipalities and communities across Canada. Since the early 1990s, the federal government has:

- withdrawn from its national leadership role in supporting and funding social housing;⁷
- placed eligibility restrictions on Employment Insurance, which offloaded people onto social assistance caseloads;⁸ and
- eliminated the *Canada Assistance Plan* (CAP), the only national anti-poverty program cost-shared with provincial and municipal governments.⁹

Some provinces, in adapting to federal disengagement from social development responsibilities, further downloaded service and cost responsibilities onto municipalities without providing the fiscal capacities to sustain these new responsibilities (e.g. Ontario Government's downloading of social housing and child care). The non-profit community service sector did not escape the impact of downloading, experiencing increasing service demands and reduced government funding support through the last decade.¹⁰

⁷ J. D. Hulchanski (2002). Can Canada Afford to Help Cities, Provide Social Housing, and End Homelessness? Notes for Discussion. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto.

⁸ Andrew Jackson, David Robinson, and Cindy Wiggins (2000). *Falling Behind: The State of Working Canada 2000*. Ottawa: Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives.

⁹ Ken Battle (2001). *Relentless Incrementalism: Deconstructing and Reconstructing Canadian Income Security Policy*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

¹⁰ Michael H. Hall and Paul B. Reed. (1998). Shifting the Burden: How Much Can Government Download to the Non-Profit Sector. *Canadian Public Administration*, 41(1), pp. 1 - 20.

The cumulative impact of downloading and devolution policies has resulted in a weakened social infrastructure at the municipal level. Municipal governments have coped with these pressures extremely ably since the early 1990s, but all acknowledge the limits of adaptive strategies under the existing mandates and limited revenue sources that municipalities currently have. Responsive and inclusive governance, not just local government administration, and sustainable revenue sources, not just property tax assessment, are central to the municipal capacity to be a true partner in a Canadian federal system suitable to the demands of the new millennium.¹¹

3. Strong and Weak Local Infrastructure

Canada, as a relatively small country in terms of the size of its cities compared to other parts of the world, has more at stake in maximizing the contribution of its human resource base to the social and economic development of the nation. Municipalities also have a stake in this mix of resources and must, therefore, re-think their traditional more limited role that primarily emphasizes land use planning and property services, commonly known as “hard” infrastructure services. They must start to focus more attention on the human and social requirements of their residents and workforces.

Separating local governance responsibilities into “hard” *versus* “soft” infrastructure is a false and shortsighted dichotomy in the new Canada. Within a decade or so cities will have either “strong” or “weak” infrastructures, reflecting the combined quality of both their physical and social infrastructures and how well these are integrated and mutually reinforcing. “Weak” infrastructure will indicate a continuing separation of the physical and social requirements of the city. Property development emphasizing market principles will produce urban sprawl, highly stratified residential populations, and high levels of expenditure on protective security services.

In contrast, municipalities developing “strong” infrastructure will integrate physical and social planning and development and will invest adequately in both. For example, public transportation facilities and carrying capacities will be developed in conjunction with city policies and supports that promote high transit usage (low fares and good service coverage) and reduce the fear of diversity (race relations programs). Affordable housing stock will be constructed in conjunction with recreation facilities and programs both accessible (no user fees) and welcoming (multi-lingual capacity) to individuals and families.

4. A Social Inclusion Framework

It is this vision of urban Canada’s future that invites the use of a “social inclusion” framework to shape municipal social infrastructure and to guide new institutional relationships and fiscal arrangements between municipalities and the federal and provincial governments. Although originating conceptually in Europe about thirty

¹¹ Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2002) *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.

years ago, social exclusion/inclusion has gained momentum in the last several years as a useful construct for public policy analysis and development.¹²

The Laidlaw Foundation, a private charitable Canadian foundation, working with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) on social infrastructure to build inclusive communities, has adopted a social inclusion framework for building inclusive and supportive communities. In a concept paper, Christa Freiler describes the meaning of social inclusion/exclusion from the Foundation's perspective:

Social inclusion gets at the heart of what it means to be human: belonging, acceptance, and recognition. Social exclusion, at the other extreme, is what is done to those who are vulnerable, considered 'disposable' or inferior, or, even less than human (e.g. through de-valuation, incarceration, institutionalization, ghetto-ization). Social inclusion and exclusion, as both processes and outcomes, are at opposite ends of the continuum.

But exclusion and inclusion are also metaphors: social inclusion for how we are alike as human beings, for what binds us together as persons; social exclusion for what divides us and the distances that separate us, whether they be economic, social or physical.

Social inclusion is not just about the periphery versus the centre; it is about participating as a valued member of society. Inclusion makes the link between the well being of children, our common humanity, and the social, economic, political and cultural conditions that must exist in a just and compassionate society.¹³

Regarding the relevance and suitability of this concept to the times and conditions of Canadian society, Freiler continues:

A focus on social inclusion is timely. 'Inclusion' and 'exclusion' have become key concepts in government policy in Europe, and are attracting international attention. In Canada, growing social divisions among families, the increase in child poverty, economic 'apartheid' resulting from racism, and the exclusion of children with disabilities from public policy frameworks, such as the National Children's Agenda, are fuelling an interest in social inclusion as a focus for public policy. In addition, the federal government's exploration of 'social cohesion' resonates with many Canadian municipalities and communities. The demographic changes brought about by immigration and the financial stresses caused by 'downloading' of responsibilities highlight the need to pay attention to issues of inclusion and diversity.¹⁴

Social inclusion reflects a growing international recognition that investments in human and civic assets are core foundations to economic prosperity and social well-

¹² Pedro Barata (2000). Social Exclusion in Europe. Survey of the Literature. Prepared for the Laidlaw Foundation, Toronto.

¹³ Christa Freiler (2001). *What needs to change? Towards a vision of social inclusion for children, families and communities*. Draft Concept Paper presented to Roundtable in Saint John, N.B., p. 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

being.¹⁵ Successful countries in the global era will develop the social capacities of people and communities to live in states of mutual trust and to contribute to innovations. Smaller countries such as Canada have a greater challenge to ensure that no human resource capacity is lost or underdeveloped, and that no civic community is neglected or undervalued. It is within municipalities that basic states of social inclusion are created and experienced in everyday life.

Social inclusion is promoted by policies:

- that reduce economic, social and cultural inequities within the population (e.g. economic disparities, racism, age or gender discrimination, etc.);
- that recognize, value, and support the contributions of all community members to the economic, social and cultural life of a society; and
- that are grounded in shared values/principles and common commitments while respecting and accommodating appropriately the diversities within a society (i.e. mutual accommodation).¹⁶

Social inclusion strategies strengthen mutual trust when:

- citizens participate in the planning and decision-making processes and structures that define and develop policies and programs;
- communities welcome social and cultural diversity and their local authorities and institutions create environments and opportunities for sharing common experiences; and
- public institutions, the private and voluntary sectors are capable of collaborating on common initiatives that strengthen community and economic capacities.

As municipalities become more prepared to assume a leadership role in the reconstruction of a Canada tailored to the conditions of the new millennium, social inclusion can serve as a helpful framework for policy and action. Current federal programs and initiatives provide some support to the physical and economic infrastructures of municipalities, but have yet to recognize the importance of sound social infrastructures for urban communities. Elsewhere, Novick has indicated what must be expected of the federal government for cities to build and sustain vital and inclusive communities:

The regeneration of civic vitality requires national policies of investments in infrastructures and institutions, and local practices that foster inclusive environments in neighbourhoods and public settings. National investments are urgently required in core infrastructure areas such as social housing and public transit. Cities and municipalities must be assured of the fiscal capacities to sustain

¹⁵ Sylvain Côté (2001). *The Well-Being of Nations. The Role of Human and Social Capital*. Paris: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

¹⁶ Marvyn Novick (2001). Social Inclusion: The Foundation of a National Policy Agenda. Paper presented to a National Conference on "A New Way of Thinking? Towards a Vision of Social Inclusion", Ottawa, November 8-9, co-sponsored by the Canadian Council on Social development and The Laidlaw Foundation.

*essential institutions and services such as schools, libraries, recreation centres, and public works.*¹⁷

Local expectations of senior government support for the new demands on municipalities must be matched with a re-framing of the responsibilities and obligations of municipalities in the new Canada. New ways of thinking about municipal mandates and responsibilities appropriate to the times are called for.

A social inclusion approach also challenges municipalities in terms of their own governance, social responsibilities and service operations, such as action in the following areas:

- creating and supporting ongoing forms of active citizen engagement in local planning and decision-making processes;
- identifying local areas of funding, planning and delivery responsibility for promotion of access and equity (e.g. integrated recreation programs welcoming all community members, such as people with disabilities; planning housing developments for individuals and families with mixed incomes);
- using local tax dollars for more than minimal social protections (e.g., preventive as well as protective public health programming, such as pre- and post-natal education for single teen mothers); and
- developing and implementing effective coordinating structures and processes with other local authorities such as school boards, public health bodies, child welfare authorities, band councils in some communities.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7

B. CROSS-CANADA COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

During the summer-fall of 2002, the Laidlaw Foundation organized eleven “soundings” in ten communities across Canada to elicit community perspectives on the social issues facing urban centres and the civic capacities required to respond to these issues. More than 240 community participants in groups ranging from 17 to 34 in size contributed their views in this process.

1. Summary of Findings

1.1 Characteristics of an Inclusive Community and City

When asked to describe what “inclusive communities” means to them, participants in the community soundings respond in ways that cluster into the following set of characteristics.

- *Integrative and cooperative* – inclusive communities bring people together and are places where people and organizations work together.
- *Interactive* – inclusive communities have accessible community spaces and open public places as well as groups and organizations that support social interaction and community activity, including celebrating community life.
- *Invested* – inclusive communities are places where both the public and private sectors commit resources for the social and economic health and well-being of the whole community.
- *Diverse* -- inclusive communities welcome and incorporate diverse people and cultures into the structures, processes and functions of daily community life.
- *Equitable* – inclusive communities make sure that everyone has the means to live in decent conditions (i.e. income supports, employment, good housing) and the opportunity to develop one’s capacities and to participate actively in community life.
- *Accessible and Sensitive* – inclusive communities have an array of readily available and accessible supports and services for the social, health, and developmental needs of their populations and provide such supports in culturally sensitive and appropriate ways (essential services identified include good schools, recreation, childcare, libraries, public transit, affordable housing and supportive housing, home care, crisis and emergency supports, well coordinated and comprehensive settlement supports).
- *Participatory* – inclusive communities encourage and support the involvement of all their members in the planning and decision-making that affect community conditions and development, including having an effective voice with senior levels of government.
- *Safe* – inclusive communities ensure both individual and broad community safety and security so that no one feels at risk in their homes or moving around the neighbourhood and city.

Participants were asked to describe what kinds of institutions, strategies and resources are required to promote and foster the vision of inclusive community that they had described. Their response clusters into the following areas:

(a) Institutions:

- *Democratic structures and processes for strong citizen and community governance* – New community governance models need to be developed for stronger citizen and community engagement in planning and decision-making processes not only with respect to government decision-making, but also for institutional planning and decision-making in major human service sector areas such as health care (e.g. hospitals, long-term care authorities), public and post-secondary education. Special efforts must be made to make sure that more vulnerable and historically excluded community members are supported to participate.
- *Recognition of the voluntary sector's role* – The voluntary sector plays a critically important role in both local service delivery and civic engagement. It needs recognition and stable funding support in order to perform both mandates well, rather than becoming reduced to serving with meager resources strictly the most marginalized victims of downloading and devolution. Strong “intermediary” non-governmental organizations at local, provincial and national levels are also important in order to facilitate and coordinate contributions to policy development from the very diverse base of the voluntary sector.
- *Reaffirmation of the public governance role* – Governments must re-establish their role in public policy development rather than assuming fiscal control as their primary missions. They should act to preserve and expand the integrity and capacity of public services and institutions. Governments should act in the public interest from a stance of “respectful listening” to the voices that express community concerns.
- *Private sector responsibility* – In several soundings, participants suggest that the business and corporate community should assume some leadership in promoting social inclusion at the local level as well. This extends from giving up some of the control and influence that business wields with politicians, to stronger business identification with and support for social issues in the community, to the implementation of inclusive employment recruitment policies and practices. The media should avoid stigmatizing groups and neighbourhoods that have high concentrations of vulnerable populations. The media should also reflect broader Canadian values, rather than primarily the corporate sector's perspective.

(b) Strategies:

- *Multi-level and cross-sectoral coordination* – Social inclusion requires much stronger intergovernmental coordination and more integrated planning and action for social and economic objectives. More cross-sectoral planning is

required, involving the various bodies and authorities responsible for health, education, social services and urban planning and development.

- *Building a broader civic consciousness* – The discussion of social inclusion must be framed and communicated in ways that reach the broad public in everyday language. It needs to be linked to other areas of growing national consensus such as the renewed public commitment to accessible health care. Strategies to gain support for inclusive communities and cities need to be designed to reach the broad middle class through the organizations and media to which citizens are connected. In that regard, the appeal for local democracy and community decision-making may have some potential.
- *Engaging youth* – Strategies that connect with youth are very important to foster and promote a more socially inclusive society. There is a great concern that existing democratic institutions lack relevance for Canadian youth. Intergenerational approaches (e.g. mentoring) would help transmit a continuing commitment to democracy and the role of public institutions, but there would also need to be significant change in these structures and processes if youth are to become truly engaged.

(c) Resources:

- *Investing in civic capacity* – Municipalities and communities lack the financial capacity and legal authority to meet the social responsibilities that have been downloaded in the last decade or more. Municipalities are unable to develop and implement strategies to promote social inclusion without greater powers and resources from senior governments.
- *Ensuring adequate funding for strong social infrastructure* – More adequate funding is needed to build strong social infrastructure made up of accessible childcare, local recreation facilities and programs, affordable housing, libraries, public transit, and a network of community service agencies providing a variety of social supports to diverse communities. Stable, core funding for community agencies in the voluntary sector is important so that these agencies can fulfill their service mandates as well as promote civic engagement and participation among their constituents.
- *Fair taxation for strong social infrastructure* – In several soundings in particular, participants stress that the resource issue has to be addressed in the context of the need to re-establish the legitimacy of collecting public revenue for provision of public goods.

1.2 Social Vulnerabilities and Their Sources

Participants' in the community soundings were asked to identify the "very vulnerable" populations in their communities and the sources of the vulnerability for each

population identified.¹⁸ Table 1 reports the participants' response in percentage terms by community sounding. Notably, several prevailing concerns about social vulnerability emerge across all the soundings:

- Poor families, children and youth. There is clearly a significant cross-Canada concern about the well-being of younger generations and the stability of the families within which they are being raised. Combining the participant response identifying "poor families/children" with the response identifying "youth" amounts to a third of the total cross-community response on socially vulnerable groups.
- Poverty, inequality, and economic marginalization. Participants in three regions of the country (west, centre, east) identify social vulnerability in broad terms such as poor people or people living in poverty, or more specifically as homeless or unemployed people, working poor, and people on social assistance. Participants, however, who identify other groups as socially vulnerable (e.g. urban Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, immigrants/refugees, seniors), also frequently associate their vulnerability with economic disparity and poverty, so that the issue of economic disadvantage is even more strongly evident than what shows up in the count for this clustered response. This intersection of multiple conditions of disadvantage compounds the impact of social exclusion in people's lives and indicates the complexity of the issues demanding attention.

Table 1: Very Vulnerable Populations Identified in Community Soundings

Very Vulnerable Population	Respondent Identification of Very Vulnerable Populations by Community Soundings Cities in Percent of Response (%)										
	(No. Respondents = 247 producing 483 responses [N])										
	Van. N=34	Edm. N=41	Sask./Reg. ¹⁹ N=55	Winn. N=45	Tor. ²⁰ N=62	Burl. N=66	Ott. N=33	Mont. N=35	St. Jn. N=50	Hal. N=62	ALL N=483
Poor Families & Children	20.6	14.6	18.2	17.8	16.1	27.3	18.2	20.0	24.0	30.6	21.3

¹⁸ Participants privately and independently completed and handed in a written form asking them to identify two "very vulnerable populations in their urban communities" and also to write down "two sources/causes of the vulnerability" for each population identified. Table 1 was created by counting the individual responses (N) on the written forms handed in by 247 respondents. The data was then analyzed to create the clusters of the major population groups listed in the left hand column of Table 1. Since the size of the soundings varied between 17 and 35, the counts reported in Table 1 have been converted into percentages for purposes of cross-community comparison.

¹⁹ Eleven participants from Regina joined 15 participants from Saskatoon for a community sounding held in Saskatoon.

²⁰ Two soundings sessions were conducted in Toronto, involving 34 participants in total. The results are combined here.

Economically Marginalized Persons	23.5	14.6	10.9	4.4	22.3	21.2	9.1	20.0	18.0	16.1	16.4
Urban Aboriginal Peoples	14.7	29.3	38.2	24.4	6.5	--	9.1	2.8	2.0	4.8	12.6
Youth	5.9	7.4	18.2	22.2	4.8	13.6	9.1	14.3	16.0	8.1	12.0
Immigrants & Refugees	8.8	14.6	--	4.4	19.4	7.6	24.1	28.6	2.0	4.8	10.4
People with Disabilities	5.9	9.8	3.6	15.6	6.5	9.1	9.1	8.6	14.0	16.1	9.9
Seniors	11.7	2.4	5.5	8.9	3.2	16.7	9.1	2.8	14.0	3.2	7.9
Racial & Cultural Minorities	--	4.9	1.8	2.2	21.0	1.5	9.1	2.8	4.0	14.5	6.8
People with Illnesses	8.8	2.4	3.6	--	--	3.0	3.0	--	6.0	1.6	2.7
TOTALS	99.9	100.0	100.0	99.9	99.8	99.9	99.9	99.9	100.0	99.8	100.0

Table 1 shows that diversity exists in all urban communities, although the relative intensity of the socially vulnerable populations identified varies by community:

- “urban Aboriginal peoples” are clearly a higher proportion of the response in all the western cities;
- “youth” are identified significantly more often in Winnipeg, Saskatoon/Regina, and Saint John (Notably, the Saskatchewan respondents specifically identify Aboriginal youth more often than the other communities, showing the finer distinctions made across regions within commonly identified vulnerable populations);
- “immigrants and refugees” show more strongly as very vulnerable among respondents in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, and Edmonton;
- “people with disabilities” are named as socially vulnerable more often in Halifax, Winnipeg and Saint John; and
- Toronto respondents identify “racial and cultural minorities” far more frequently than respondents in the other communities (21%), although, at 14.5%, Halifax respondents also do so significantly higher than the response rate of 6.8% for all soundings.

Table 1 conveys a sense of the breadth and complexity of urban diversity that exists within communities across Canada, which is important information. Still, the relative

proportions of socially vulnerable populations for any urban area should not be automatically converted into a list of higher and lower social priorities. Rather, the distribution of vulnerability identified across groups in the soundings' response reflects the relative intensity of the impact of social and economic conditions on different sub-populations as they constitute any particular urban community. As pointed out by a participant in the Saint John, N.B. sounding, setting social priorities on the basis of a sub-population's size relative to other sub-groups in the population would produce social policy and supports that would neglect the social needs of significant numbers of people just because they constitute a proportionately smaller part of the population in relation to other identified groups.²¹ This is a form of exclusion. In the Burlington sounding, one participant suggested that the non-identification of "urban Aboriginals" as socially vulnerable may indicate that there are barriers to Aboriginal people even living in the area, one of the more affluent, homogenous communities in Ontario. This might indicate another form of exclusion.

The participant response on the causes of vulnerability is more informative about the social priorities of urban communities. Participants were asked to identify two major "sources/causes" for the vulnerability of each population identified. The 830 participant written responses cluster into the following areas:

- Failing Social Support Systems (27% of all responses). There are two components to participant response on this issue. About a quarter of the response identifies the lack of strong family and social networks as the source of vulnerability for many people, creating conditions of "isolation" for them. The rest of the response (75%) refers to the failure of social and service support systems to meet people's needs. This includes service cutbacks, unavailable services, inadequate levels of service, inappropriate services (e.g. culturally insensitive settlement support for different immigrant groups). Childcare is mentioned most frequently as a specific unmet service need, but there is also reference to unmet support needs in areas such as health services, recreation, transportation, legal advocacy, and drug rehabilitation. Lack of effective coordination among service providers is also reported as an issue creating vulnerability for some populations, as is the difficulty for people to get clear information on service supports.
- Deprivation of Basic Living Conditions (24%). In this cluster of responses, poverty and economic inequality are the single most identified source of social

²¹ For example, only 6.5% of the response identifies "Urban Aboriginal Peoples" as very vulnerable in Toronto. The actual urban Aboriginal population in Toronto is 16,095 (1996 Census, CMA Toronto), less than 1% of the current Toronto population. Compared to western cities, the relative intensity of the needs of the urban Aboriginal population in Toronto is less pronounced, certainly less than the City's immigrant and refugee population (Canada West Foundation [2001] *Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada: Realities and Policies*, Interim Report, Calgary, Alta.). This does not mean that socially inclusive strategies for Toronto should ignore the requirements of the Aboriginal population. Notably, the *Final Report* of the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues (November, 2002) points to pilot programs to reduce inequities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals and states, "Our urban vision of 2020 should see the scope of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy extended to all urban regions." (p.2).

vulnerability for all populations. It is expressed in its most severe terms among participants in Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, and Saskatoon/Regina. There is more moderate identification of the issue in the other communities as “inadequate incomes”, “low minimum wage”, “low social assistance rates”, etc. Unaffordable, unsafe, and poor quality housing is identified as another dimension of inadequate basic living conditions, including the lack of appropriate supportive housing for seniors and people with disabilities.

- Barriers to Developmental Opportunities (17%). Unemployment and the lack of education are identified as another source of vulnerability. Lack of jobs and resulting high levels of unemployment prevent people from supporting themselves and their families. Poor employment opportunities and low prospects for uneducated and unskilled workers are issues. Part of this response identifies the lack of good employment skill training and, for the newcomer population, the lack of recognition of the knowledge, skill and experience in trades and professions that many immigrants bring to Canada. Participants identify poor education levels frequently as a source of vulnerability for youth and Aboriginal people. They see barriers for many groups to return to school or to get basic learning help such as English language training for immigrants.
- Prejudicial Societal and Cultural Attitudes (15%). Biases and prejudices in society towards poor people and people who are perceived as “different” are strongly identified as a major source of vulnerability for many groups. There are two main almost equally expressed components to this participant response. Participants indicate that the stigma of poverty and of certain conditions such as disability, single parenthood, age (“disconnected” and “alienated” youth or poor, “dependent” seniors), and homosexuality contribute significantly to the social vulnerability of these populations. The second major component of this response cluster is culturally-based, systemic, and institutional racism toward Aboriginals, immigrants, refugees, and racial minorities. Participants use the strongest language when identifying racism as a major source of vulnerability, conveying the notion of tremendous social distance in terms such as: the “cultural domination”, “historical segregation”, “marginalization and ghettoization”, “apartheid and colonization” experienced by Aboriginal peoples and the “foreign-ness” and “cultural distance” faced by immigrants and refugees.
- Harmful Public Policy, Unresponsive Bureaucracies and Powerless Citizens (14%). Some participants point more directly and explicitly to policymakers and government systems as the primary source of social vulnerability. Public policy driven by individualism and market principles rather than collective interests and public welfare constitute a significant part of this response. About a third of this response refers more specifically to rigid and unresponsive bureaucracies with particular reference to the welfare and education systems. Another third of this response identifies the erosion of democratic institutions and the political powerlessness of disadvantaged groups. A number assert the

importance of helping vulnerable people move from the status of “clients” or “consumers” to “citizens” with a strong political voice.

- Individual Considerations (3%). A small number of participants identify individual behaviours and lifestyles as the source of vulnerability for some populations.

Soundings’ participants identify the preceding as the major causes of social vulnerability in their urban communities. Except for a broadly shared concern about the impact on families, children, and youth, the relative intensity of the effect of the above on other population groups varies with local conditions particular to each community. In the western cities, the social vulnerability of Aboriginal peoples is highlighted because of their increasing migration into urban communities unprepared to ensure adequate living and social supports. Similar conditions exist in centers such as Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa for immigrants and refugees, leading participants to emphasize their social vulnerability.

The social priorities of urban communities must be framed in terms of eliminating the sources of social vulnerability however reflected in the diversity of urban populations across Canada. The central question here is the civic capacity that municipalities and local communities have to respond to, reduce and eliminate the social vulnerability of their residents. Clearly, downloading and devolution policies of the last decade or more have severely reduced civic and community capacity in this regard.

1.3 Governments’ Understanding of Urban Social Needs

The Laidlaw Foundation’s community soundings did explore participants’ views on civic capacity. This line of inquiry began with a search for what Neil Bradford calls the important “*contextual knowledge*” for policy-making at all levels of government.²² When asked independently to rank order the three levels of government in terms of how well they “understand the social needs of the community”, soundings’ participants rank municipal government highest in understanding by a wide margin over the other two levels of government (75% of 197 respondents rank city government first and only 5% rank it third).²³

Table 2 shows greater cross-Canada clarity among respondents on the place of municipal government on this question than on the other two levels of government, which share the second and third ranking on understanding almost equally, except for in Winnipeg, where the provincial government is ranked first.

²² Neil Bradford (2002) *Why Cities Matter: Policy Research Perspectives for Canada*. Ottawa: CPRN Discussion paper F|23, p. 4.

²³ The total response is lower for this questions and the following questions reported here because they were presented in the last hour of the soundings’ sessions. Not all participants were able to be present for the full three hours and some chose not to answer the questions.

Table 2: Rank Ordering by Community Sounding, “Understanding the Social Needs of the Community”

<u>Level of Gov’t</u>	<u>Community Soundings Cities</u>									
	Vanc. ²⁴	Edm.	Sask/ Reg.	Winn	Tor.	Burl. ²⁵	Ott.	Mont.	St.Jn.	Hal.
Municipal	1st	1st	1st	2nd	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
Provincial	2nd	3rd	2nd	1st	3rd	2nd	3rd	2nd	2nd	2nd
Federal	3rd	2nd	3rd	3rd	2nd	3rd	2nd	3rd	3rd	3rd

1.4 Desirable Municipal Revenue Sources for Social Responsibilities

Participants recognize that cities have neither the authority nor the financial resources to take leadership on the social priorities in their communities. On the resource question, there is less ambiguity in the cross-Canada soundings on the roles of the senior governments in relation to municipal revenue requirements. Participants were asked independently to rank order their top three “most desirable” municipal revenue sources from the list provided in Table 3.

²⁴ In Vancouver participants as a group felt no level of government had demonstrated any degree of understanding. After some discussion, the facilitator presented the individual option of not submitting the rank ordering or interpreting the question in terms of “relative confidence” that the three levels of governments could achieve some understanding of the community’s social needs. Eleven of the 17 Vancouver participants did submit a rank ordering on this modified question.

²⁵ Only three second place choices separated the Burlington respondents’ ranking of the provincial and federal governments on understanding the community’s social needs

Table 3: Rank Ordering by All Soundings Participants of "The most desirable ways for cities to secure sufficient revenues to meet their social responsibilities"

<u>Most Desirable Revenue Sources</u>	<u>Rank Order</u>			
	1st	2nd	3rd	Total Response
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
<u>Use existing local revenue sources (e.g. property tax, user fees, licence charges).</u>	26 (14)	13 (7)	23 (13)	62 (11)
<u>Seek funding from the provincial government for services and programs.</u>	15 (8)	64 (35)	50 (29)	129 (24)
<u>Seek direct funding from the federal government in priority areas (e.g. housing, income support, early development, etc.).</u>	77 (40)	55 (30)	37 (22)	169 (31)
<u>Seek the city's access to new revenue sources (e.g. a share of income tax revenue).</u>	56 (29)	37 (20)	28 (16)	121 (22)
<u>Seek corporate contributions to city services and programs (e.g. recreation, early development, etc.).</u>	11 (6)	10 (5)	30 (17)	51 (9)
<u>Other (write-in suggestions)</u>	6 (3)	5 (3)	6 (3)	17 (3)
<u>TOTALS</u>	191 (100)	184 (100)	174 (100)	549 (100)

Aggregated for all participants across all the community soundings, the top three overall selections for the "most desirable" municipal revenue sources to meet new social responsibilities are:

- (1) direct federal funding gathering 31% of the total response and 40% among first choices;
- (2) provincial government service and program funding with 24% of total response primarily on the strength of second (35%) and third (29%) choices; and
- (3) municipal access to shares of additional tax revenue from senior governments with 22% of total response, which includes the second highest first choice (29% of respondents, mostly from the Toronto and Ottawa soundings).

Notably, in terms of total response, existing municipal revenue sources (11%) and corporate contributions (9%) are distant fourth and fifth choices respectively in respondent preferences.

Table 4 below reports a cross-community comparison of the rank ordering of the most desirable municipal revenue sources. It shows that:

- direct federal funding to municipalities is the top choice in seven communities and second choice in the other three;
- access to new tax revenue is the top choice in the two Ontario communities, Toronto and Ottawa, falls to second in Saskatchewan²⁶, Winnipeg, Burlington and Montreal, but does not make the top three in Vancouver and Halifax; and
- provincial funding as a first choice only appears in Edmonton, participants arguing in discussion that the Province of Alberta has the resources to do more for municipalities.

Overall, these findings clearly reflect a strong preference for “direct federal funding” to municipalities. Notably, participants choose “direct federal funding” *first* in all seven of the community soundings where the federal government is ranked *third* in understanding community social needs (Vancouver, Saskatoon/Regina, Winnipeg, Burlington, Montreal, Saint John, and Halifax in Table 2).

It is also interesting that in two of the community soundings in Ontario, where the “new deal for cities” debate has raged for more than a year now, respondents select “access to new municipal revenue sources” as the first choice. The same survey question was asked of more than 240 Toronto participants in 22 focus groups in the fall of 2000 as the “new deal” debate was just getting underway. At that time, the Toronto participants ranked the direct federal funding option ahead of access to new municipal revenue sources.²⁷ Perhaps, the public discussion of new municipal roles and resources in the last two years has increased the viability of the option for new municipal tax sources in the minds of people in Toronto.

²⁶ In discussion, Saskatoon/Regina participants note that some municipalities are advocating for a return to a former provincial policy that provided a percentage of provincial revenues (income taxes, royalties, etc.) to municipalities, which used to be a major source of funding for municipalities. In his September, 2002 Local Government Bulletin No. 30 (<http://www.localgovernment.ca>), John Sewell confirms this precedent as well for other provinces such as Alberta, Quebec, British Columbia and Ontario, referring to a citation by Andrew Sancton (University of Western Ontario) of a book by Kenneth Crawford in 1954 called *Canadian Municipal Government*.

²⁷ Peter Clutterbuck and Marvyn Novick, (2001) *Preserving Our Civic Legacy. Community Consultation on Social Development*. Toronto: Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, p. 35.

Table 4: Rank Ordering by Community Sounding of Most Desirable Municipal Revenue Sources for Social Responsibilities²⁸

<u>Desirable Revenue Sources</u>	Community Soundings Cities									
	Vanc.²⁹	Edm.	Sask/ Reg.	Winn.	Tor.	Burl.	Ott.	Mont.³⁰	St. Jn.³¹	Hal.³²
<u>Existing</u> (e.g. prop. tax)	3 rd	4 th	3 rd	5 th	4 th	4 th	6 th	4 th	4 th	5 th
<u>Provincial Government Funding</u>	2 nd	1 st	4 th	3 rd	3 rd	3 rd	3 rd	2 nd	2 nd	3 rd
<u>Direct Federal Government</u>	1 st	2 nd	1 st	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	1 st	1 st
<u>New Sources</u> (e.g. share of fed/prov tax)	4 th	3 rd	2 nd	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th
<u>Corporate Contributions</u>	5 th	6 th	6 th	4 th	5 th	5 th	4 th	3 rd	6 th	2 nd
<u>Other³³</u>	NR	5 th	5 th	6 th	6 th	6 th	5 th	NR	5 th	6 th

In discussion, participants in the Laidlaw community soundings express the following expectations of all levels of government on the urban social agenda:

- A broad consensus across most communities that the federal government should take a leadership role in establishing equity provisions and national standards in a variety of important policy areas such as health and affordable housing.³⁴ Tied to this is the federal government's responsibility both to collect tax fairly and to redistribute resources equitably. Participants generally see

²⁸ Rank orderings by city were calculated by assigning a weighted point value to participant responses. Weighted values were as follows: 3 points for each first choice, 2 for each second choice and one for each third choice.

²⁹ One point value difference between the 2nd and 3rd rankings among Vancouver participants.

³⁰ Montreal respondents expressed reservations about the question, and were clear in discussion that they preferred a renegotiated financial arrangement between the federal and provincial governments, which would then lead to redistribution of funds from the provincial government to municipalities. Several participants chose not to respond to this question.

³¹ One point value difference between the 3rd and 4th rankings among Saint John participants.

³² One point value difference between the 2nd and 3rd rankings among Halifax participants.

³³ The 4% "other" responses includes references to lottery funding, more corporate taxation, closing tax loopholes, user fees, environmental assessment charges, provincial and federal "block grants, hotel and real estate levies.

³⁴ Only in the Burlington sounding did participants not identify this "national equity" expectation for the federal government.

federal policy and funding support for affordable housing as important to urban communities, but federal funding for other local physical infrastructure needs is also identified such as transportation (Vancouver, Toronto) and recreation facilities (Edmonton, Winnipeg).

- Provincial responsibility for ensuring regional equity within the provinces is identified as important. A number of social areas are specified as requiring more adequate levels of provincial funding support including education, children and youth services, and housing.
- Participants see the municipal government role primarily in terms of planning, development and delivery of services, although the breadth of service involvement varies across communities. The most frequently identified area of municipal responsibility is in need identification, planning, program development and implementation of affordable housing. Participants most often connect this area of municipal activity to federal and provincial policy and funding supports, although they recognize particular municipal responsibilities in creating housing in areas such as land use planning and zoning regulations.
- In addition to assigning policy, funding and service areas to the three levels of government, participants also identify some major public governance issues with implications for all levels of government. They generally decry the top-down policy and program development approach. While demanding more engagement of senior governments in meeting the social needs of communities, participants insist that more effective mechanisms of citizen and community input would have to be put in place.

2. Community Perspectives on Strong Social Infrastructure for Inclusive and Supportive Communities

Discussion in the community soundings related to the preceding findings generated thinking in four broad areas about important considerations in creating local social infrastructure for inclusive and supportive communities:

- (1) Adopting inclusive planning perspectives for different local and regional conditions;
- (2) Establishing effective working relationships among the three levels of government and more sophisticated cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms to pursue shared social objectives;
- (3) Striking a workable balance between national principles/standards and local initiatives in the performance of governance responsibilities for strong social infrastructure; and
- (4) Ensuring democratic process and political accountability in policy development, planning and decision-making.

2.1 Inclusive Planning Perspectives

Differing local conditions create opportunities for planning inclusive social infrastructure in an integrated way with physical and economic planning in urban communities. Participants in the cross-Canada soundings appreciate that all urban communities are subject to the same global forces. Still, they can point to conditions and circumstances in their own economic, social, cultural and political environments that are specific to their own situations and vary across urban communities:

- Communities like Ottawa and Halifax are dealing with forms of amalgamation that incorporate large rural areas into their municipal jurisdictions.
- Toronto, and increasingly the Greater Toronto Area, is easily the most racially and culturally diverse urban community in the country.
- Saint John records the highest level of poverty among young women and single parents in the Maritimes, while the population is aging and there is an out migration of younger prime working age people.
- In Montreal, downloading of basic need services onto communities is severely affecting the innovative, community development work in the non-governmental sector.
- Saskatoon and Edmonton share the trend of a growing migration of Aboriginal youth into their municipalities. In Saskatoon's case, this is occurring while the white population is aging and declining. In Edmonton, Aboriginal migration adds to the general population growth both from other parts of Canada and from immigration.

Participants in the Saint John sounding are able to take a "life-cycle" perspective on the pattern of social vulnerability that they describe for their region. Their identification of major vulnerable populations breaks down into:

- poor families and children (24%);
- youth (16%);
- economically marginalized adults (18%);
- and seniors (14%).

All are higher than the overall soundings rates for their groupings in Table 1. Notably, because of the homogeneous character of the Saint John population (predominantly white Anglophone and Francophone), participant identification of immigrants/refugees (2%), racial/cultural minorities (4%), and urban Aboriginal peoples (2%) as vulnerable groups are far below the overall soundings response rates (10.4%, 6.8%, and 12.6% respectively).

In discussion, participants in Saint John express concern about the future of their children and youth, the wasted energy and ability of too many unemployed and under-employed adults, and the diminishing capacity of an economically depressed

economy to continue to support the growing senior population. They note that economic conditions are leading to an overall declining population base.

Putting this all together, participants conclude that Saint John needs an economic revitalization strategy with a social development component. This would employ more of the currently unemployed adult population, retain more young people in the area, plus attract more immigrants to the area. Furthermore, participants also express an interest in more immigration so that their children would more directly engage with the multi-cultural diversity of the world rather than connecting to it only through the media and the Internet.

Similar to Saint John, participants in Saskatoon/Regina highly rank poor families, children and youth as vulnerable populations (combined 36.4% of response). Among all the soundings, however, Saskatoon/Regina participants show the highest concern for the growing Aboriginal populations in their cities (38.2%). In discussion, Saskatoon/Regina participants refer to the high risk factors for Aboriginal youth and young families migrating from poor rural areas to the cities. They also note that the dominant white population is aging and declining and that the economic capacity of the community to continue to support an older population is decreasing.

Again, the participants' way of looking at the issue is not to view the migration of Aboriginal youth into the cities as a major social burden, but rather as an economic and social development opportunity. Policies and programs are needed that respond to the educational, social and cultural development of this population, which will essentially re-make the nature of the urban population in Saskatchewan in the long run. This approach must be jointly undertaken by government and community-based organizations including leadership from Aboriginal community organizations. Participants see this as the only way to sustain Saskatoon and Regina as viable urban communities.

In both of the preceding examples, the use of a life-cycle perspective in thinking through the future social and economic development of the respective urban communities, adapted to the specific cultural and geographic conditions in each local area, facilitates the framing of strategies that would promote social inclusion.

This suggests that national/provincial policy frameworks and resource transfer strategies to municipalities should allow urban communities to address fundamental issues of decent living conditions and social support systems in ways responsive to the nature of their own forms of urban diversity. A national-municipal social infrastructure strategy should be as adaptive to the needs of urban Aboriginal peoples in western cities as to those of the relatively higher immigrant and refugee populations in other urban areas such as Toronto, Montreal or Edmonton.

2.2 Effective Multi-level and Cross-sectoral Coordination

Strategies grounded in a social inclusion framework require more adaptive responses to local conditions and social priorities at the ground. The *Final Report* of the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues identifies the critical issue of inter-governmental partnerships on the urban agenda and the important leadership role of the federal government:

*At the core of the debate is the relationship between and among federal, provincial and municipal governments and how to develop opportunities to strengthen these partnerships. The significant presence of the Government of Canada in urban regions is a major factor in this equation and key to its success.*³⁵

Canada's multi-jurisdictional governance framework demands fairly sophisticated coordination in the performance of roles and responsibilities in several ways:

- (a) *inter-governmentally*, among the three levels of governments from the lower-tier municipal to the highest tier federal government;
- (b) *inter-departmentally*, across both federal and provincial departmental mandates; and
- (c) *inter-sectorally*, across a range of local authorities in various fields of human service within communities (e.g. municipal councils and administrations, school boards, public health bodies, child welfare agencies, public transit authorities, Aboriginal service councils, etc.)

Jenson and Mahon point out that political will can override presumed jurisdictional, institutional and even constitutional barriers to effective collaboration and coordination among the three levels of government.³⁶ There is evidence to that effect on the urban agenda already in Canada. In July 1999, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia and the Government of Canada signed an Urban Development Agreement Regarding the Economic, Social and Community Development in the City of Vancouver.³⁷ This Agreement established the principles and framework for joint work on sustainable development in the City, giving first focus to the Downtown Eastside, the poorest part of the City. Community input was sought in public meetings before the agreement was struck, leading to the identification of several top priorities for collaborative work: community health and safety, housing, economic development, and community capacity-building. A major issue for local participants regarding community capacity-building was the need for resource support to enable local people, especially the most disadvantaged, to participate in

³⁵ Judy Sgro (2002) *Canada's Urban Strategy. A Blueprint for Action*. Ottawa: Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues, Interim Report, November, p. v.

³⁶ Jane Jenson and Rianne Mahon (2002) *Bringing Cities to the Table: Child Care and Intergovernmental Relations*. Ottawa: CPRN Discussion Paper F|26, p. 4.

³⁷ The Downtown Eastside Revitalization Program – Vancouver Agreement is available at <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/planning/dtes/agreement.htm>. It is also described briefly in Judy Sgro (2002) *Canada's Urban Strategy. A Vision for the 21st Century*. Ottawa: Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues, Interim Report, p.17.

the planning process. The Agreement is an encouraging tripartite partnership, although it has not progressed as quickly and smoothly as originally hoped.³⁸

From 1995 to 2000, the City of Winnipeg joined in partnership with the Province of Manitoba and the Government of Canada in the \$75 million cost-shared Winnipeg Development Agreement (WDA).³⁹ WDA initiatives during the five-year period included: downtown revitalization; a City employment equity program focusing on jobs and training for Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, visible minorities, and women; and a neighbourhood revitalization program. Two inner city neighbourhoods were the focus of neighbourhood revitalization planning and funding, leading to the creation of two multi-service neighbourhood resource centres used to co-locate a variety of social service and program delivery personnel. Community agencies worked collaboratively with government officials in the planning and development of these initiatives. Additional city-community collaboration and investment has occurred since the WDA expired.

These two examples demonstrate the ability of the three levels of government to re-engage with each other on shared goals and objectives. Unencumbered by "silo" thinking, both agreements start with the particular nature and needs of the specific communities and cities. The vision is framed and the priorities identified at that level. Then, existing structures are adapted and cooperative planning mechanisms established to pursue coordinated strategies that encompass social, health, cultural, even economic objectives.

Participants in the Laidlaw cross-Canada soundings identify more effective inter-governmental coordination and collaboration as essential to the achievement of shared social and economic objectives. As the discussion of devolving more power and resources to the local level picks up momentum, however, they also emphasize the need to attend to coordination of the various governance bodies that exist *within* local and regional jurisdictions. An array of local authorities exist including municipalities, school boards, public health bodies, child welfare agencies, public transit authorities, Aboriginal service councils, etc., all relating to important areas of social concern. The challenge for effective local and intra-regional social governance is great and will only increase if local powers and resources to urban communities are enhanced.

2.3 Balancing National Principles and Local Initiatives

Participants in the cross-Canada community soundings are fairly consistent in expressing a higher level of confidence that municipal governments understand the social needs of communities better than the senior levels of government (Table 2). This holds true even though most soundings' participants see their municipalities as

³⁸ Observation made at the Vancouver community sounding, August 26, 2002.

³⁹ Telephone conversation with Wayne Helgason, Winnipeg Social Planning Council in November, 2001 and see *Urban Development Agreements: What's been accomplished* at <http://www.wd.gc.ca/eng/ced/urban/accomplished.htm>.

having little authority and insufficient resources to meet the social needs of their populations.

Soundings participants are also clear about their expectations of the federal-municipal relationship. When it comes to new municipal revenue sources for local social priorities, direct federal funding to municipalities in priority areas is the strongly preferred option (40% of first choices). Consistently, in soundings discussion, participants support the federal role in ensuring national equity and standard setting in important areas of social policy such as affordable and social housing, childcare and settlement services. It is important to note that this question was not fully discussed at the Montreal sounding, although participants did feel that the federal and provincial governments needed to work out their distinctive roles more clearly.

Soundings' participants consistently express frustration with policy development in senior government departmental "silos", highly categorical eligibility requirements, and bureaucratically rigid programs unresponsive to their urban community's needs. City and community participants in the Saskatoon/Regina sounding highlight this point with a recent housing example. They contend that existing senior government programs could be made more flexible in local implementation. While acknowledging that low-cost rental housing is an important part of a national housing program, they point out that the low land and housing costs in their cities relative to other urban centers in Canada enables the production of more ownership-based low-cost housing with federal program funds. Federal affordable housing funds, however, are only available for rental units, not low-cost home ownership. The federal housing objective would be better met in Saskatchewan if there were provision for low-cost home ownership as well as rental housing production, which would enable low-income people in this part of the country to build assets as well as secure affordable housing.

The preceding suggests an interesting tension between national principles and local initiatives. Since a national debate on stronger municipal social mandates and increased resources is underway, the balance between the federal government as the guardian of national equity and municipal government as the instrument of local planning and delivery must be carefully negotiated.

Jenson and Mahon address this issue as a "*real conundrum*", saying:

[T]here is a trade-off between equity across space and local knowledge of needs. . . . Too much movement in either direction could provoke either fragmentation or excessive control by the center. The only to [sic] way to arrive at a sustainable equilibrium is through careful discussion followed by implementation rather than empty promises left unfilled.⁴⁰

Jenson and Mahon offer several Canadian and international examples of multi-level governance and "*flow-through*" funding relationships that have demonstrated how to

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

achieve the delicate balance between national and local governmental roles.⁴¹ They conclude that “*trust-based*” governance is the key and “*that a real democracy . . . demands that each level of government take into account the democratic commitments of the others*”.⁴² One clear implication of a re-negotiated federal-municipal governance relationship would be “*finding a way to bring cities to the intergovernmental table*.”⁴³

This thinking is very consistent with the views of participants in the cross-Canada community soundings. Regarding the restructuring of national and local relationships, however, soundings participants are not content to leave local participation completely in the hands of municipal councils and civic officials. Most city councils across the country have limited experience in a wide range of social supports. In all soundings, participants are clear that local initiatives must also actively engage citizens and communities in planning and decision-making structures and processes. They expressly identify non-profit, community organizations (including a range of neighbourhood-based, issue-focused, and ethno-culturally-identified groups) as important vehicles for citizen and community engagement. Participants talk of “umbrella” and “intermediary” planning and advocacy organizations at the local, provincial and national levels as having essential roles in facilitating contributions to policy development from the very diverse voluntary sector base. Therefore, stable funding arrangements for community organizations are necessary to ensure the capacity exists to reach out and support high levels of active participation.

2.4 Democratic Process and Political Accountability

There is common agreement in the community soundings that citizens and communities are feeling increasingly disconnected from public policy development and decision-making. Worse, participants are very concerned about the erosion of participatory democracy and the lack of political accountability at all levels of government. Only in Winnipeg and Saskatoon/Regina do participants indicate a sense of optimism and hope for improvement. They attribute this confidence to responsive governments and active community organizations that collaborate relatively effectively. Winnipeg and Saskatoon/Regina participants, however, acknowledge that urban Aboriginal peoples, the population both communities identify as the most socially vulnerable, have less political voice and influence than they should. Communities ranking immigrants/refugees, racial/cultural minorities, and economically marginalized groups high in terms of social vulnerability also identify barriers to effective political voice that these groups encounter.

⁴¹ Jenson and Mahon point to the Alberta Government’s comfort with federal funding of municipal child care services under the old *Canada Assistance Plan*. They offer the *Supporting Community Partnership Initiative (SCPI)* in the housing areas as another example of direct municipal access to federal resources in an area of national priority need. The Swedish example of negotiated block grants with municipalities for locally defined social priorities is another example.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 5

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 6.

There is serious concern in all urban communities that this “democracy deficit” is particularly alienating to young people, for whom present democratic institutions seem inaccessible and irrelevant. Proposed solutions to this development range from major institutional reforms such as electoral systems based on proportional representation to more open and accessible civic structures and processes at the community level. Some working examples in several communities are available. On the whole, community soundings participants are clear that meaningful community participation and civic engagement are essential components of building inclusive communities.

There is a growing literature on reinvigorating local democracy, some presenting new approaches to civic participation such as participatory budgeting in Brazil.⁴⁴ There is also more attention in Canada to civic engagement and democratic practice, including discussion of the role of civil society in relation to government. In her study of civic engagement in the Canadian context, Susan D. Phillips concludes:

*In a vibrant democracy, voluntary organizations are themselves spaces for the exercise of citizenship and conduits for connecting citizens to government. Effective citizen involvement not only promotes the direct participation of individuals in policy processes, it also encourages the development of strong associational networks with active, democratic memberships. These serve as intermediary sites of deliberation and as vehicles for collective action that link citizens to policy processes.*⁴⁵

In discussion, some argue the need to elevate the voluntary sector beyond the limits of what the label “voluntary” suggests. The “third” or “voluntary” sector is sometimes presumed to carry less credibility or legitimacy than the public or market sectors. In terms of power and resources, the voluntary sector is at a disadvantage in relation to the other two. Yet, in the public mind, the voluntary sector rates fairly highly. EKOS Research Associates report a telephone survey of more than 1200 Canadians in October 2002 showing that 86% have moderate-to-high confidence in the voluntary sector compared to 67% moderate-to-high confidence in government and 76% in private companies. More than 85% of survey respondents indicate that “voluntary organizations understand the needs of average citizens better than government”. In a smaller EKOS survey, three-quarters of leaders from academia, the media, and the public, private and voluntary sectors state in the next five years that the voluntary sector should give high priority to “participating in the development of social and economic policy” and “promoting citizenship and

⁴⁴ Rebecca Abers (2000). *Inventing Local Democracy: Grassroots Politics in Brazil*. Boulder: Lynne Rynner. See also, Robert Putnam (2000) *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster; Miriam Wyman, David Shulman and Laurie Ham (2000). *Learning to Engage: Experiences with Civic Engagement in Canada*. Ottawa: CPRN Inc.; and Jeffrey M. Berry, Kent E. Portney and Ken Thomson (1993) *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy*. Washington: The Brookings Institution.

⁴⁵ Susan D. Phillips with Michael Orsini (2002). Mapping the Links: Citizen Involvement in Policy Processes. Ottawa: CPRN Discussion Paper No. F|21, pp. 30-31.

civic engagement.”⁴⁶ The voluntary sector must become recognized as critically important to the emergence of a “civic sector” in urban communities across Canada, reflecting community voices wishing to contribute to the quality of civic life.

⁴⁶ EKOS Research Associates. (2002). Positioning the Voluntary Sector in Canada: What the Elite and the General Public Say. Presentation report to the Steering Committee of the Voluntary Sector Initiative, Ottawa, October 8.

C. CIVIC ALLIANCES FOR A MUTUAL CANADA

"Canada has a unique model of citizenship, based simultaneously on diversity and mutual responsibility. This model requires deliberate efforts to connect Canadians across their differences, to link them to their history, and to enable their diverse voices to participate in choosing the Canada we want."

Government of Canada, Speech from the Throne, September 30, 2002

1. Social Infrastructure: Voices and Values

The civic capacity of large and small municipalities to sustain communities of social and cultural diversity living in states of vitality and harmony is a fundamental challenge to the future of Canada. It is within municipalities that basic states of social inclusion are cultivated and experienced. It is within civic communities that the relationships between citizenship and diversity are established. When social vulnerabilities and racial differences lead to serious disparities of circumstances and prospects, as is disturbingly evident in Canadian communities, then diversity is stripped of dignity and citizenship is devoid of mutual responsibility.

The contention that Canada has a unique model of citizenship based on diversity and mutual responsibility affirms that the project of social inclusion is fundamental to the distinctive identity and character of the country. As a society, we do not possess the military or economic might to impose our presence on the world. Canada attracts people from every part of the world who want to come with their families and talents to live, work, and enrich our communities. Social inclusion then is a promise of common membership and equal opportunity.

Infrastructure refers to the basic, underlying features of a system or organization. It may highlight fundamental facilities or sectors that sustain vital areas of capacity and provision. More familiar forms of urban infrastructure include basic amenities such as roads, sewers, transit, schools, parks, libraries. These amenities provide a basic foundation for settlement and economic activity. However, on their own, they cannot assure inclusion and innovation. A focus on "social" infrastructure compels us to look at the civic capacities of these amenities to generate and sustain relative states of well-being of diverse populations in settlements across Canada.

Whom civic capacities sustain and include - who is respected and valued, who is supported, who contributes to economic and community life - these are fundamental questions about the quality of social infrastructures. Social inclusion can be universal or selective. Settlements and environments can welcome the proximity and the presence of all who share a common civic space, or can restrict inclusion to those who enjoy structural advantage and privilege. These are not technocratic issues for which there is a rational calculus of utility to guide our directions. Market frameworks of the greatest good for the many are inherently exclusionary. The many does not include all.

Democratic concepts of universal citizenship lead to principles that value full inclusion - not 60% inclusion, not 80%, but a 100% standard of inclusion. Is this not precisely what the principles of medicare are all about - 100% inclusion of all Canadians in common and shared environments of care that can respond to a diversity of life cycle and contingent health circumstances. The 100% standard of inclusion embedded in medicare is founded on voice and values. This is what a major legacy of this Prime Minister will be - creating a public platform for a respected national voice [that of Mr. Romanow] to recover and reclaim shared national values of full inclusion in common systems of care.

Thus, the social infrastructures of settlements and communities are grounded in voices and values. Whose voices and which values are central issues of civic and national development. The structural challenge is to ensure that public platforms are created which reach out and amplify the voices of diversity and mutual responsibility in settlements and communities across Canada. These voices are frequently muted by traditional divisions within Canada, in which we territorialize our social diversities through provinces.

The cross-Canada soundings of community and civic leaders revealed shared patterns of social vulnerability and structural disparity in urban communities across provinces. The soundings identified strongly shared values on the desire to create fully inclusive communities of engagement and proximity which value and respect diversity. The soundings pointed to the impacts of deficient support systems and depleted living standards on civic capacities for inclusion. There was a clear recognition that local conditions have national significance, and this was reflected in the dominant call from community and civic leaders across Canada for direct federal engagement in helping to create and sustain inclusive communities.

There are many dimensions to the scope of federal contributions required to build vital cities and inclusive communities. These were outlined in reports of the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues calling for federal investments in affordable housing, transit and transportation, and sustainable infrastructure. While the final report of the task force identified social harmony as a core national and urban requirement, and cited the need for investments in people and social infrastructure by all orders of government, it was unclear whether the call for federal funding of a national infrastructure program included a social infrastructure dimension.

In its 2002 submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities [FCM] called for federal support of community social infrastructure to address areas of affordable housing, homelessness, recreation and play spaces for children, pilot community engagement initiatives, and support for local strategies on drug abuse. FCM called for \$10 million from Ottawa to establish an FCM-administered centre for

community social development to work with the philanthropic and private sectors to identify local priorities on engagement and inclusion, to connect municipal and community leaders on social infrastructure development, and to monitor best practices.

Both the Prime Minister's task force and the FCM submission were relatively silent on initiatives to address the emerging diversity of Canada. Limited attention was paid to the deteriorating status of recent immigrants and refugees in larger urban communities. Civic and national strategies are required to create public platforms to profile the voices of diversity and vulnerability in communities across Canada.

2. Civic Panels: Building Cross-Canada Community Networks

The eleven community soundings funded and organized by the Laidlaw Foundation in urban regions across Canada during the summer and fall of 2002 brought together civic leaders, agency professionals, and social advocates committed to building and sustaining inclusive communities. Participants in the soundings are important sources of civic capacity in developing local and national strategies for social infrastructure development. These civic participants are sources of direct engagement with vulnerability and diversity on the ground in communities across Canada. They know the impacts of senior government policies on living conditions in their communities. They work with local public services and community agencies to create inclusive practices which respond to vulnerability and diversity. They incubate and nurture new sources of civic leadership from among the easily forgotten and ignored. Their collective voices are a national asset that needs to be recognized and strengthened.

One way to continue the discussion within and across communities initiated through the Laidlaw urban soundings would be to support the development of horizontal networks of shared interest and commitment on identified areas of critical concern. The construction of cross-Canada civic panels could serve as a vehicle for joint municipal and community input into the development of social infrastructure policies and practices which address vulnerability and diversity in large and small municipalities.

Civic panels would be pilot initiatives to reflect a new approach to national initiatives - creating horizontal networks across communities with hubs outside of Ottawa. This would ground national perspectives in daily community life, and ensure that work at the local civic level was recognized as having national significance. This is frequently lost in vertical centres based in Ottawa.

A process for creating and supporting the work of civic panels should be developed. Federal funding could be provided to a joint pilot initiative of the FCM Social Infrastructure Committee and community social planning organizations in a select number of urban communities in different regions of Canada. In each urban

community, a civic panel would be established to conduct a civic social audit on states of social inclusion in that community. Each panel would be jointly chaired by a municipal councillor and community leader with strong commitments and experience on issues of vulnerability and diversity. The framework, protocols, and procedures for conducting the civic social audit in each urban location would be jointly developed in work with the pilot communities. Audit activities would be expected to include the development of key inclusion indicators, profiles of promising municipal and institutional practices which recognize diversity and promote inclusion, documentation of the impacts of senior government policies on community living standards, municipal hearings to platform community voices of vulnerability and diversity, expert task groups to recommend policy and program initiatives, and public reporting on states of social inclusion.

Civic social audits would address issues of inclusion of particular significance to each urban community, as well as common areas of concern revealed in the cross Canada soundings. While the relative intensities of exclusion and vulnerability may vary by local conditions, there was widespread apprehension in the soundings on states of inclusion and well-being of children, youth, and families. Too many children and youth were being left behind, and too many families were living without the security of basic amenities and resources. Urban communities had limited capacities to support the diverse and common requirements of vulnerable families, and the healthy development of all children and youth.

The soundings revealed that urban communities across Canada are struggling to build civic frameworks committed to social justice and equity for people of diverse circumstances and origins. Civic panels would promote the sharing of knowledge and experiences on how urban communities respond to particular diversities [e.g. urban Aboriginal peoples, immigrants and refugees, ethno-racial/cultural diversities, people with disabilities.] A key objective of this panel would be to ensure that voices of diversity are recognized as core Canadian voices in the development of civic practices and national policies for social inclusion.

3. Federal Responses to Civic Priorities

The Laidlaw community soundings revealed an emerging fault line in Canadian federalism. Civic leaders, advocates, and social professionals in major urban regions across Canada want direct federal contributions to strengthen the social infrastructures of their communities. On the whole, there is less confidence and credibility of provinces as exclusively mandated voices of municipalities and their priorities. Civic communities share concerns and commitments that frequently cut across provincial jurisdictions, and can help create a sense of social unity across Canada if they are recognized and supported as authentic national voices.

There is a need to review and assess the role of large and small urban communities in the development of national social frameworks. Strong civic

alliances across the country represent the best hope of promoting and sustaining Canada's unique model of citizenship based on diversity and mutual responsibility as highlighted in the 2002 speech from the throne.

Social inclusion is a national challenge to the integrity and continuity of Canada. The capacity of urban communities in every region of the country to provide conditions of well-being for all citizens across the life cycle, to recognize and value differences among peoples of global diversities and origins, and to live a common life of proximity and vitality will define Canada to itself and to the world. The federal government has acknowledged social responsibilities in areas vital to national continuity - medicare, a social security system for seniors, equalization payments to sustain comparable public services in provinces. Recently, federal funding responsibilities have been directly extended to new national frameworks for early development and regulated child care.

The social infrastructure of urban communities is a new frontier of federal responsibility. Social infrastructure priorities include serious contributions to affordable housing and public transit, strengthening services and programs for immigrants and refugees, recognizing recreation as an essential urban amenity for health promotion and civic cohesion, facilitating the transitions of urban aboriginal peoples to urban life, and developing effective preventive approaches to community safety and security. These areas are too vital to be left to the discretion of provinces. While provinces have responsibilities and contributions to the social infrastructure of urban communities, an active federal presence will ensure that provincial responsibilities are met.